



Not The Spoken Word

Bi-monthly newsletter of The Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

A Letter from Oppy

Thomas Massam, now 83, was an active amateur racer in WA in the 50's. In 1952 he received the below letter from Hubert Opperman in response to a request for training advice. Thomas recently made a generous donation of the letter to the club along with his state jersey, his amateur certification and some photographs.

25th February 1952

Dear Mr. Massam,

Acknowledgement is made of your letter of the 6th January, and I must apologise for not replying at an earlier date. However I have been away Interstate and at Canberra, and this is the first opportunity I have had to reply.

Actually I cannot hope to go into any great detail, but if I can find some training hints which I wrote some years back I will have them forwarded to you.

(1) Diet is a subject of its own, if you decide to specialise. I followed one known as the "Dr. Hay" diet, but that only came after years of experience. Meantime keep to grills, avoid fried foods and pastries, eat plenty of fruit and do not eat heavily within 1½ hours of a race.

(2) In a race, eat small quantities and often. Do not drink unless thirsty, and then only a mouthful at a time.

(3) I couldn't possibly tell you how to massage - books by specialists are written on this subject, and masseurs take special courses at the Universities. However the object of massage is to tone up tired muscles and create a feeling that you are better for this. If your muscles are sore afterwards as a result of the massage or you do not feel any better for it, then you should change your masseur. After road training, you need at least an half hour "rub down" at least three times a week.

(4) Australians use 6½" cranks only because they happen to always be B.S.A. standard length. Continental cranks used by the worlds' greatest are invariably the equivalent of 6¾" or 7". I would say that with your size, you would be justified in using 6¾" at least or 7" but 6¾" would be the safest. Only do not mess around once you have decided.

(5) Do not worry about the size of your chainwheels. The actual gear is the most important. If you have 8 gears, you should have from 68 up to 96" with the variations from one to the other as regular as possible.

(6) Position - This is rather difficult to check, as differing lengths of leg, arm etc. make a differences I think that I have dealt with this in the notes I spoke of. However you should be riding about 2½" to 3" behind the bracket, with the centre of your handlebar stem being level with the tips of your fingers, when your elbow is against the nose of your saddle. To check your length of leg required when the foot is in its correct place on the pedal, see if you can ride just comfortably with your instep.

(7) Gymnasium period - Same as for boxing, except that prolonged skipping should be avoided as it tends to jar the muscles. Ground work, leg stretching, toe touching etc., is good, in fact, all exercises which are correctional against the tightening up by the pedalling are good.

Be careful not to overdo them though when you are tired from long training, and it is a good idea to cut back gymn work you when are this has started, and to step up the time in the gym when you are doing less cycle training.

(8) Mileage is not easy to specify but to be really fit, you should be riding 300 - 350 miles a week - 6 weeks before the events. If you are feeling stale and not recuperating between training rides, ease down your speed and cut back on distances. This depends also on the time you have available, and it is useless to try and pile up miles when your working hours make you tired.

Above all, whenever you line up, you must be fresh, and to have great mileage in your legs, and be (not) tired from lack of form, time to spell up, simply means that you can never show your true form.

I trust that these few remarks will be of some assistance.

Congratulations on your success to date, and best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Hubert Opperman

Club Calendar

Meeting - Monday Apr 18th 7.30pm

Speaker Alan Naber

Ardross Clubroom

Ride - Saturday May 7th

Vancouver St Festival and Tweed Ride, Albany

Meeting - Monday May 16th 7.30pm

Ardross Clubroom

Display - Arthur Grady Day Saturday May 28th

Kings Square, Fremantle

AGM - Monday Jun 20th 7.30pm

Ardross Clubroom

Meeting - Monday Jul 18th 7.30pm

Ardross Clubroom

Meeting - Monday Aug 15th 7.30pm

Ardross Clubroom

Ride - Coolgardie Aug 17th - 21st

Coolgardie to Ora Banda, details below.

Coolgardie to Ora Banda Ride

The Great Southern Division of the WA Historical Cycle Club is organising a vintage bicycle ride in the Goldfields to ride in the tracks of a bicycle courier pioneer.

This ride is not too far being approximately 70kms over 2 days. It's not for wusses as it involves riding gravel roads and camping out in the Goldfields bush. It is not a compulsory ride as you can ride as much or little as you like because the bus will be following the riders.

Spring sees the Goldfields at it's best and I'm sure there will be some great times on the bus trip, both out on the road and around the campfires.

Please email me for the draft itinerary and meal menu plan.

Glenn Huffer

hufferfamily@bigpond.com

Wanted

William Riseborough is chasing a Sturmey Archer 3 speed hub 36 hole 175mm OLD, preferably with a coaster brake. briseborough@bigpond.com

Alan Naber is hoping to locate his copy of "The Dancing Chain" lent to a member (forgotten which one!) some time ago.

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Vice President: Merv Thompson

Treasurer: Malcolm Bell

Secretary: Kym Murray

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DISCLAIMER The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the WA Historical Cycle Club and the accuracy of information published herein is not guaranteed.

Bikes in the Goldfields

Most of the text and images used in the staging of the club's recent exhibition at the Museum of Perth are now available on the club website;

<http://historicalcycleclub.com.au/hidden>

The text below has been adapted from "The Bicycle In The Bush" with kind permission of Jim Fitzpatrick.

Gold finds around Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in the early 1890's were followed by a massive population increase. Local demand for postal and telegraph services was not met by the state government for years. Bicycles were the transport of choice proving to be more reliable and faster than horses and camels in situations where large loads did not need to be carried.

Bikes have the added advantage of not needing to be fed or watered, particularly important in the arid interior. A cyclist uses less water per km than a traveller on foot, much less than horses or camels.

Bicycles remained in common use in the outback for decades after motor vehicles arrived. Up to the 30's distances of 200km in a day were not uncommon for fit travellers and workers, including prospectors, rabbit proof fence and pipeline inspectors, cycle ambulance services and kangaroo shooters. Shearers and the clergy both tended far flung flocks on two wheels.

How many bicycles?

From 1895 to 1900 around 100,000 bicycles were sold in Victoria, which was thought to be the most in Australia. However this, in part was due to the large population, 1,200,000 in Victoria, compared to 190,000 in WA (source - ABS). The per capita ownership of bicycles was highest in Western Australia, and Coolgardie in the Goldfields is estimated to have trumped every other place in Australia for bicycle ownership. In the 1890s roadster bicycles, the most common used in the bush, retailed for £25 to £35, (roughly \$3000 today) but by 1900 it was possible to buy new bicycles under £5 (roughly \$500 today)

How much did bikes weigh?

One (of many!) amazing facts about bikes at this time is that common weights were under 11.8 Kg with a range of 10.2 to 12.2 Kg. This compares well with the weight of modern steel "fixies" All early bikes (pre 1900s) were fixies – and brakes were not widely used. Freewheels were adopted after about 1900, but rod and calliper brakes did not become common until around the 1920s.

Reliability and distances travelled

Even more remarkable is the craftsmanship used on many old bikes. They were used as daily transport in the bush in dirt and on corrugations, and they had to be reliable. It has been estimated (by Jim Fitzpatrick) that some bikes did more than 160,000 kms and were used daily on average for over 20 years.

Bikes proved to be more reliable and faster than horses and camels in situations where large loads did not need to be carried. As well as speed – for any distance over 3km a cyclist is faster than a horse and the greater the distance the bigger the margin. Bicycles were extensively used throughout Australia right up to the 1930s, but nowhere more routinely than the Western Australian Goldfields, an area of more than 770,000 square Kms.